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ABSTRACT

A study examined the positive effects that being a parent may have on communication teachers. Three major advantages that parenthood gives teachers (self-disclosure, use of humor, and the incorporation of games and activities) were considered. Several informal interviews with communication instructors who raise children were conducted. One hundred college students of various majors who were enrolled in communication courses taught by those instructors completed surveys concerning whether such strategies enhanced the teaching and learning experience. Results indicated that: (1) self-disclosure was an effective means by which teachers may foster affinity with students, link course content to actual life experience, and help to reduce communication apprehension; (2) 76% of students said they liked teacher to use self disclosure; (3) humor, like self-disclosure, fostered a warm communication climate and increased teacher approachability; (4) 97% of the students liked teachers' attempts at humor in the classroom; (5) because of parental experiences, the breadth and depth of games, simulations, and activities used in the classroom increased; and (6) 78% of the students liked the incorporation of games and activities into the classroom. Findings support the use of self-disclosure, humor, and games and activities as affinity-seeking strategies to improve teacher-student relationships. (Contains 75 references.) (RS)

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Exploring the Impact of Parenthood on the Role of Communication Teacher

by

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Exploring the Impact of Parenthood on the Role of Communication Teacher

Introduction

The 1960's were a decade filled with change in our country. The gamut of change during this one decade ranged from landing people on the moon--to the Vietnam war--to the resurgence of equal rights issues for women and minorities. Interestingly, many of the changes we continue to experience during the 1990's are, in essence, an indirect result of these initial innovations occurring more than twenty years ago. For example, we now explore outer space well beyond our own moon. Also, we are finally attempting to deal with the consequences of Vietnam on veterans and their families. And, we continue the struggle to achieve equal rights for all people.

One consequence resulting from the women's liberation movement of the 1960s has been an increasing number of women in the workplace (Borisoff and Merrill, 1992; Pearson, et. al., 1991). Prior to the 1960s, women most often chose between marriage and career (Weiner, 1985, p. 6). In the 1990s, however, dual career marriages are commonplace. Moreover, beyond combining career and marriage, many dual career couples are also choosing to raise families (pp. 6-7).

This fairly recent shift toward dual career couples also raising children has spawned several new debates concerning the effects of dual career parents on children. Much of this research tends to focus on various problems arising in dual career families. The kinds of questions typically pursued include: the devestating dilemmas of daycare on children; the lack of nutritious diets offered to children of working moms; the increased use and abuse of drugs by unsupervised teenagers; the impossible "supermom" syndrome of working mothers; the tension between spouses regarding responsibility sharing; and the conflicting perceptions of stay-at-home moms and satisfaction (Andreson, 1991; Belsky and Eggebeen, 1991; Benin and Edwards, 1990; Biernat, 1991; Bunker, 1992; Cherlin, 1993; Crouter, et. al., 1990; Darnton, 1990; Desai, et. al., 1989; Exter, 1991; Fish, 1992; Herbert, 1989; Hewlet, 1990; Hoffman,

1989; Lang, 1992; MacEwen and Barling, 1991; Olsen, et. al, 1990; Schnittger and Bird, 1990; Vannoy, 1992; Wiersma, 1991).

I agree that these kinds of questions are worth researching during an era when more and more families are headed by parents who work outside the home. I am troubled to note, however, that there has been relatively little scholarly research published about the benefits of combining career, marriage, and family. This paper, then, is an attempt to bring forward one possible benefit derived from combining career and family.

Specifically, college professors who are also parents may bring many valuable perspectives and insights with them into the classroom based on their unique roles as parents outside the classroom. Personally, I feel enough has been written to enlighten readers about the negative consequences which may arise when professors are also parents. The problems to which I am referring include adjusting work schedules in order to care for sick children, arranging daycare to accommodate extended day courses, juggling teaching schedules to coincide with public school and extra-curricular activities, and discovering enough hours to pursue "quality time" for families as well as for research endeavors. Where a dirth exists in the research, however, is with regard to the positive influences parenting may have on professors and, subsequently, their students. By addressing some of these positive influences, it is my hope that readers will begin to consider ways in which their own unique life experiences outside the ivory towers of the university may be utilized to enhance the teaching and learning experience in their classrooms.

I have found that my experiences as a parent enhance my role as a communication teacher in several ways. Numerous studies affirm that college students are demanding that their instructors be approachable before, during, and after class (Beatty and Zahn, 1990; Dombart 1989; Gorham, et. al., 1989; Govindarajan, 1991; Kearney, et. al., 1991). Beyond this

desire expressed by students for positive relationships with professors, educational research also suggests that students learn more effectively in classrooms where teachers and students have developed a mutually positive rapport (Christophel, D., 1990; Frymier and Thompson, 1992; Gorham and Christophel, 1992; Kearny, et. al., 1991; Rogers and Webb, 1991). In addition, for public speaking teachers in particular, good rapport is essential to reduce communication apprehension in students (Ericson and Gardner, 1992; Littlefield and Sellnow, 1987; McCroskey, et. al., 1989). In terms of how my role as a parent enhances my ability to teach effectively, three particular areas seem most significant. The first area centers around self-disclosure and affinity-seeking as they foster positive teacher-student relationships. Second, my experience as a parent equips me with an appropriate means by which to bring humor to the classroom scene to both warm the communication climate generating positive student-teacher relationships as well as to reduce communication apprehension. Finally, my parenting experiences help me generate games and simulations to use in my classroom in an attempt to encourage cooperative, active, and generative learning among students. The following paragraphs expand upon each of these concepts as they relate to teaching and learning in the communication classroom.

Method

Supporting material for this study is grounded in several ways. Initially, I developed hunches about the benefits I believed to be gleaned by students in my own courses as a direct result of my experiences as a parent. I determined three major advantages to be centered around self-disclosure, use of humor, and the incorporation of games and activities. I then conducted a fairly extensive interdisciplinary literature review to determine whether or not research supports these techniques as favorable to the teaching and learning experience. Upon discovering the utility of these strategies in general, I conducted several informal interviews

with other communication instructors who also raise children to discern whether or not my opinions are shared by others. I asked them about the degree to which they may or may not use these kinds of techniques in their courses as a result of their experiences as a parent and why. Finally, I surveyed 100 college students of various majors who are currently enrolled in communication courses taught by the instructors I interviewed in order to determine the degree to which students believe such strategies actually enhance the teaching and learning experience. The students surveyed for this study were enrolled in undergraduate courses ranging from the fundamentals of public speaking, to voice and articulation, to interpersonal and small group communication. In approaching this topic from these varying perspectives, I hoped to glean a more accurate account of the impact of parenthood on the role of communication teacher.

Discussion

Parental Self-Disclosure and the Communication Classoom

Much research has been conducted to support the notion that appropriate self-disclosure on the part of the teacher can improve teacher-student relationships, warm the classroom communication climate and, in some cases, reduce communication apprehension.

Initially, Norton (1983) determined that a dramatic teacher who uses style behaviors including humor, self-disclosure, and narratives, is perceived to be more effective at helping students organize their ideas and define relevent course content. Moreover, Christophel (1990) discovered that teachers who utilize various verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors increase student motivation and learning. Further, several earlier studies (Anderson, 1979; Norton and Nussbaum 1980) also concluded that immediacy expressiveness on the part of the instructor is a potentially significant factor in improving instructional effectiveness. Finally, Gorham, Kelley and McCroskey (1989) discovered that teachers who employ affinity-seeking strategies including self-disclosive messages develop a warmer

communication climate in the classroom.

More specifically, Nussbaum (1980) contends that teachers' disclosive statements usually reveal information about their education, teaching experience, family, friends, leisure activities, and personal problems. Downs, Javidi and Nussbaum (1988), in a study of nine award-winning teachers, learned that an average of five self-disclosive messages occurred within each fifty-minute class session during the course of one semester (p. 135). They discovered further that self-disclosure is one specific verbal behavior which award-winning teachers utilize to relate course content to life experience in order to help students grasp course material. Finally, Littlefield and Sellnow (1987) identified that self-disclosure is an effective prerequisite to reducing communication apprehension in beginning college-level public speakers.

Based on existing research in communication education, then, it appears obvious that self-disclosure is a teaching strategy which may be used to improve teacher-student relationships, warm the communication climate, increase teacher effectiveness, and even reduce communication apprehension. The additional question posed in this study, then, is: How does self-disclosure about topics related to parenting help to fulfill these kinds of functions?

Self-disclosure in my classrooms is often centered around my children and the various trials and tribulations I encounter in the process of raising them. These examples are "safe" in that, while they are indeed about my personal life, they do not cross important teacher-student boundaries which could be construed as teacher misbehaviors (Kearney, Plax, Hays, and Ivey, 1991). For example, I can discuss the concerns I am having about my 3-year-old son's chronic ear infections. I can share my uncertainty about whether or not to put in tubes, or the communication effectiveness and ineffectiveness I encountered when pursuing the issue with various health professionals, or even the lack of sleep I am getting as a result of being up at

night with him.

In this particular self-disclosive statement alone, I am able to accomplish a number of things. Initially, I reduce uncertainty about who I am and that I, like my students, act in a number of roles. Students often contend that teachers seem to have nothing else to think about or to do than worry about their course material. By disclosing these kinds of examples, my students learn that I am human and also balance competing demands in my life. A certain degree of affinity may be attained via these kinds of examples. Moreover, as I reveal the difficulties I encounter in communicating with health professionals, my students can apply various aspects of communication theory to a real life situation. Finally, via this example, my students realize that I empathize with their busy schedules in that I also am sometimes busy to the point of being deprived of sleep. Again, some degree of affinity may be attained in an attempt to create a positive teacher-student relationship. By seeking-affinity with my students in this way, I hope to be perceived as an approachable teacher. As a teacher who empathizes with students and seeks affinity through self-disclosure, it might follow that when a student approaches me with a late assignment, she or he will choose to be responsible for the consequences rather than blame me for her or his problem (Kearney, Plax, and Burroughs, 1991).

Research suggests that self-disclosure should be linked to content to be deemed beneficial to students rather than considered a "Strays from Subject" teacher misbehavior (Kearney, Plax, and Ivey, 1991, p. 314). Thus, while self-disclosure about family life may increase immediacy and affinity, it must also be linked in some way to the subject matter. Another example I have used in class has arisen during discussions about conflicting cultural perceptions of nonverbal communication cues. As we discuss eye contact, I mention that looking at others directly in the eye as a sign of respect is a cultural norm not universally shared. However, in our culture, we learn direct eye contact as early as toddlerhood. I explain that one

of my daughter's favorite songs is one where she sings, "You gotta stand up tall. Gather up a smile. Take a big breath. Look 'em in the eye and say 'Hi'" (Grammar, 1986). Again, uncertainty about my life beyond the classroom is reduced, thereby increasing affinity; and, content material is linked to an example from real life.

There are times in my classes when I self-disclose about my family without the primary intention of seeking affinity or linking actual life experience to specific course content. Rather, I self disclose about my family in an attempt to bring a larger social issue into perspective by illustrating how it is manifested in the experiences of my children. For example, in my public speaking course, I talk about the need to use gender-inclusive language. Sometimes students will question the significance of this requirement. I may offer questions my daughter has raised such as "Why do firemen have to be boys?" or her observations that "Boys are the doctors and girls are the nurses" to elaborate on my point. Granted, six-year-olds perceive the world in very concrete terms. However, what a six-year-old perceives blatantly may very well be the same as what a 26-year-old perceives on a more subconscious level.

There is an additional benefit to be attained from self-disclosing about my family in the communication classroom. This benefit is rooted in the concept that self-disclosure often begets self-disclosure. As I share personal examples from my life and about my children, students may refer back to their own childhood experiences as they attempt to seek affinity with me. This can be a significant benefit in that students may be more willing to reciprocate disclosive statements about their own experiences as children rather than about more recent events. Disclosing about childhood experiences offers a safe haven for reciprocal disclosures on the part of students. As our communication climate warms and mutual trust develops, perhaps past experience examples will be replaced with more current experiences.

Why are these reciprocal disclosures so important to the communication classroom?

Research suggests that communication apprehension is reduced when a speaker feels s/he knows the audience (Littlefield and Sellnow, 1987). Speaking to a group of strangers is cited in many basic public speaking textbooks as a reason for increased speaker anxiety. Thus, when an instructor's self-disclosures about parenting affords students a comfortable opportunity to reciprocate, all group members benefit by reducing uncertainty and increasing affinity among one another, thereby potentially reducing communication apprehension, as well.

Educational research supports self-disclosure as an effective means by which teachers may foster affinity with students, link course content to actual life experience, and even help to reduce communication apprehension. My experiences as a parent provide me with a wealth of examples to which students can relate in order to achieve these goals in the classroom. Finally, in the survey of college students conducted for this study,76 percent of the students surveyed responded that they"like it," none responded that they "don't like it," and 24 percent responded that they "don't care" when their teacher self-discloses about her/his family during class. Reasons students offered for liking such self-disclosive statements included "It makes the instructor seem human--easier to identify with," "makes it easy to relate to my own life experiences," "builds a feeling of trust that allows for approachability," "makes it easier for me to open up about my own family experiences," and "shows a real life example of what she is talking about." In sum, the reasons I have stated for using personal family experience examples in the classroom appear to be supported, not only by the research, but also by students in the classes surveyed for this study. A parent can capitalize on her/his family experiences to foster affinity, link course content to life experience, and encourage reciprocal disclosure from students to aid in the reduction of communication apprehension.

Parental-Based Humor and the Communication Classroom

Just as self-disclosing about my experiences as a parent enhance the teaching and

learning experience in my classroom; so, too, does my role as a parent equip me with humorous examples to share with the group. Much research has been conducted to support the use of appropriate humor by teachers to achieve immediacy, enhance motivation, and increase learning among college students (Downs, Javidi, and Nussbaum, 1988; Gold, 1990; Gorham and Christophel, 1990; Harris, 1989; Hickerson, 1989; Inman, 1991; Kelley and Gorham, 1988; Nussbaum, 1992; Schwarz, 1989; Warnock, 1989). Much of this research also denotes that inappropriate humor is detrimental to the learning experience. Warnock (1989) summarizes several benefits for using humor in adult education. First, it provides tension release. He explains "When adult students and colleagues laugh, there is first a contraction followed by a release that is both mentally and physically salutary" (p. 22). He contends that humor loosens mind sets "Playfulness and laughter can enable students and colleagues to perceive ordinary information in unusual patterns and connections" (p. 22). Humor helps teachers and students bond, can be a form of gift-giving, can relieve boredom as long as the jokes or stories "fit into the flow of the conversation," are respectful and "sensitive to the feelings of others" and are a "continuing commitment" on the part of teachers (pp. 23-24).

Gorham and Christophel (1990) write that teachers use humor in the classroom for some reason, albeit "to reduce tension, to facilitate self-disclosure, to relieve embarrassment, to save face, to disarm others, to alleviate boredom, to gain favor through self-enhancement, to entertain, to convey goodwill, or to accomplish some similar goal" (p. 58). They claim further, that "the proportional use of self-depricating comments and of tendentious comments in general had a negative impact on the general assessment of humor frequency" (p. 58). Attempts at humor which have been identified as detrimental include the use of sarcasm and putdowns, verbally abusive remarks (Kearney, Plax, and Ivey, 1991, p. 316), overuse of self-depricating and tendentious comments, and abundance of humor by teachers lacking in other

immediacy traits (Gorham and Christophel, 1990, p. 58). One might speculate, then, that using humorous examples from parenting experiences could enhance the teaching and learning experience for students as long as the instructor has established an appropriate degree of immediacy/affinity with the group and as long as those examples meet the expectations delineated above.

In my classroom, self-disclosive examples often also serve as a simultaneous attempt at humor. This attempt at increasing affinity through the use of humorous examples is supported in the research. Humor, like self-disclosure narratives, must be linked to the content to be most effective. Moreover, some degree of affinity appears to be a prerequisite in evoking the perception of "appropriate teacher humor" from students. Thus, combining these strategies seems to make sense. To elaborate, the example I offered about my daughter and direct eye contact usually evokes laughter from students. It appears to be funny to see a professor role-playing the part of a child. Perhaps, then, I am somehow deemed more human to my students while generating laughter which, according to Warnock (1989), releases tension and loosens the mind to be more open to new ideas.

Other times, the humorous examples derived from my role as a parent are rooted in my inadequacies or failures. According to the research, too much self-depricating humor can be detrimental to teacher credibility (Gorham and Christophel, 1990; Kearney, Plax and Ivey, 1991). However, failures experienced in my role as a parent may serve as effective humorous examples simply because they do not focus on inadequacies linked to my role as a college professor. To a certain degree, it is beneficial for students to realize professors are human and do make mistakes. Illuminating mistakes made in one's role as a parent is less likely to reduce one's credibility in her very different role as a professional educator.

Humor, like self-disclosure, can be used to foster a warm communiation climate and

thereby increase teacher approachability. Humor can also serve to release tension in the classroom. As with self-disclosure, humor is deemed most effective when it is somehow linked to course content (Inman, 1991; Nussbaum, 1992; Sullivan, 1992; Warnock, 1989). In my interpersonal classroom, humorous examples derived from family experiences directly connected to course content are easily generated. For example, when discussing conflict resolution, I have posed the example of how to approach a roommate about the "glob of toothpaste" s/he perpetually leaves in the bathroom sink. I explain that this is a real problem for me since I have two small children and I realize that students in this classroom probably don't experience it with adult roommates. Some students chuckle. Others blush. This "safe" attempt at humor provides a real life scenario to which the group apply the interpersonal problem-solving skills learned via the course content. These kinds of real life scenarios are grounded, however, in my experiences as a parent.

In the survey I conducted, an astounding 97 percent of the respondents "liked" these attempts at humor in the classroom. Many of the reasons offered for liking these humorous examples centered around approachability comments like "it lightens the mood and reduces the tension found in the classroom," "it makes the class more interesting and personal," and "it helps to loosen people up so they're not as afraid to interact or speak up." Another topic which arose in many of the comments focused around reducing speech anxiety. Some examples of student responses included "keeps nervousness in this class to a minimum," "it puts everyone at ease and makes it easier to speak up in front of the class," and "it helps take the pressure off of speaking." Based on this survey, perhaps humor (like self-disclosure) also aids in reducing communication apprehension among college students in addition to warming the communication climate

Activity-Generation by a Parent in the Communication Classroom

Finally, my experiences as a parent also help me generate games, simulations, and activities in the classroom which may encourage cooperative, active, and generative learning among students. Games-based education has long been regarded as an important means by which to engage gradeschool children in learning (Cerny and Cerny, 1989; Goodlad, 1984; Randel, 1992). Its merit as a teaching strategy for older strudents and adults, however, has only begun to surface in recent years. The concept of active learning dates back to John Dewey (1934,1938) and the progressive education movement. In recent years, researchers are discovering that, not only do children learn best by doing, but so do adults (Cavaliere, 1992; David, 1991; Eisner, 1985; Goodlad, 1984; Greene, 1988; Magney, 1990; Maroufi, 1989; Oliver and Gershman, 1989; Pesanelli, 1990; Petranek, 1992; Randel, 1992; Thatcher, 1990). It is enlightening to discover that a significant number of journal articles offer simulation and game possibilities for a variety of disciplines ranging from engineering to mathematics to education to theatre (Barker, 1989; Gucciardo, 1991; Matzkin, 1990; Specht, 1991).

Petranek (1992) writes that three important levels of learning can be attained via simulations and games: participating, debriefing, and journal writing. Students learn to cooperate and function in groups during the participating phase, learn from each other well as from the instructor during the debriefing phase, and integrate the theories to their own experiences and cognitive processes during the journal writing phase. These phases of learning which games-based education fosters so effectively are difficult and often impossible to attain through traditional teaching methods.

Magney (1990) notes that "Game players may be reaping benefits on three dimensions --cognitive, attitudinal, and motivational" (p. 55). Cognitive benefits range from gains in

factual knowledge to improved decision-making skills and a better understanding of general principles. Enthusiasm toward learning is enhanced and participants are also likely to experience "a more positive attitude toward the subject matter, the teacher, and their own capabilities as students" (p. 55). Games curriculum can be more effective than traditional modes, argues Magney, in that "they can provide a better understanding of complex processes, generate student enthusiasm about a topic and the larger learning process, and help develop skills in analysis, decision making, and interpersonal communication" (p. 56).

Certainly, one need not be a parent to incorporate games-based learning into their classrooms. However, I have discovered that, because of my experiences as a parent, the breadth and depth of simulation ideas from which to draw has increased dramatically. I draw directly from my parental experiences when generating games and activities in my classes in a number of ways. Some of the activities I generate are attempts to connect theory to actual life contexts. Other activities, however, are offered in an attempt to improve the communication climate in the classroom by generating enthusiasm among students as a means by which to increase receptivity to learning.

I teach at a university in the upper-midwest. To claim that winters here are long is an understatement. During the months of January and February, students begin to suffer what I term "seasonal motivation deprivation." Spring break seems a long way off and maintaining motivation for academe is quite difficult. Thus, to keep students motivated about course content and even coming to class, teachers must either bribe them with participation points or adjust their classroom style in some way. Since there are some rather serious ethical arguments against awarding students points merely for attendance, I contend that motivation must be stimulated via some other means. Active learning and games-based education, at least for me, is an ethcial and effective alternative.

My daughter is a first-grader at one of the public elementary schools in the city. I was, at first, amazed at her ceaseless desire to go to school even on these dreary winter days. I decided there must be something her teacher (and other elementary teachers, as well, I'm sure) was doing to keep motivation levels high. (Personally, I wanted to either hybernate or fly south and I was fairly certain my students felt the same way.) Why was my daughter continually excited to go to school? I found one answer to be in the learning games and activities her teacher incorporated into each week. For example, students learned about civil rights during the week of Martin Luther King Junior's birthday. They also celebrated his birthday with a party and cake. Aha! That was it! Plan something fun to entice students to come. Then, when you've got their attention, teach them something!

I had planned a video presentation and analysis activity of Martin Luther King Junior's "I have a Dream" speech for my public speaking class. Why not also bring a Birthday Cake to celebrate? I decided to take the risk and try it. I was amazed at how this slight deviation from the norm spurred students to become actively involved in the discussion after the video. The atmosphere shifted from "ho hum" in nature to one of enthusiastic involvement. Interesting, I thought.

North Dakota usually experiences a mid-winter thaw in late January or early February. For some reason, we did not enjoy such a thaw this year. I was as tired of winter and as anxious for spring as any of my students. I joked about my seasonal depression (S.A.D.) before my Voice and Articulation class began one day. A student suggested we have a beach party during class next time. Again, a link to something I had noticed at my daughter's school surfaced. I had observed the Kindergarteners doing just that the week before. They were clad in swimsuits, splashing in wading pools, and building sandcastles right in their classrooms. I looked at the schedule and discovered that we would be viewing and discussing a video about dialects during the

next class session. Students were somewhat surprised when I said "Sure, let's do it. Your ticket to the beach party will be to write your name on the board using the international phonetic alphabet (another concept we'd been working with during the course) and offer an item to contribute to the party. " I did, however, forbid wearing swimsuits to class. This group responded in much the same way as did the public speaking class during the Martin Luther King, Junior video. Students came prepared to write their names on the board, brought items for the party like beach towels and sunglasses, and participated enthusiastically during the discussion of the video. (One student even brought hot dogs.) Not only did the atmosphere improve, students were also significantly more receptive to the teaching and learning process than they had been during the few sessions prior to this one.

Games-based education is obviously more than merely providing "atmospheric-uppers" in the classroom. Most simulations I bring to the classroom are related more directly to the content. For example, I use a good deal of role playing activities and case study scenarios in the classroom. I've also been known to asks groups of students to draw a group picture of what a particular communication concept means to them, . . . color it (I provide the crayons), and present their pictures to the rest of the class. I've also had groups apply Monroe's motivated sequence in the form of a 2-minute "commercial" where they attempt to sell an item to the rest of the class. The items come from a grab bag I supply. Examples of items have included a disposable diaper, Peter Panda bubbles, a pacifier, teddy bear, and so on. Selling these childhood items poses a difficult challenge in listener relevance when the room is filled with college students. My experiences as a parent have helped to remind me that learning can also be fun. I've found my students enjoy the non-threatening environment which games and activities provide. Some skeptics may argue about a lack of seriousness which might be communicated about important concepts, however, to those skeptics I say "Try it, you might like it. . . . and you

might be surprised at how much theory your students retain through such applications."

I discovered that 78 percent of the students surveyed, "like" the incorporation of games and activities into the classroom experience. Nineteen percent said they "don't care" and no one responded that they "don't like it." Respondents who indicated they "don't care" also didn't offer any specific reasons. Students who said they "like it" offered reasons including "games make the classroom fun and I learn without knowing it," "it makes class more interesting and it helps you understand if you can experience it first hand by using games, activities, etc.," "games and activities make learning in this class easier and fun," "it helps break the monotony of just taking notes all the time," "it is a change of pace. . . makes me more interested," and "I feel hands-on is easier to understand. I learn a lot from games." The results of this survey appear to support the contentions that activity-based learning helps make abstract theories more concrete as well as changes the pace in a way which may make students more receptive to learning.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this paper, I have offered several possible benefits to be gleaned from being both a parent and a college professor. Too often, research tends to highlight only the negative consequences resulting from combining work and family. This study is one attempt at tipping the scale back in the other direction. Three areas where I feel my experiences as a parent enhance my competence in the commuication classroom center around self-disclosure, use of humor, and incorporating games and activities. The results of this study confirm previous research that teachers' use of self-disclosure, humor, and games/activities as affinity-seeking strategies in order to improve student-teacher relationships. Moreover, such strategies can enhance learning when they are linked to course content.

This study extends the existing research in that it focuses specifically on experiences,

examples, and activities derived directly from my role as a parent. Based on this study, it appears that capitalizing on one's family life experiences for the purposes of self-disclosure, humor, and activity-generation may, indeed, foster positive student-teacher relationships as well as enhance learning. Moreover, utilizing family life experiences for such examples may also help the teacher to avoid the potential negative outcomes (i.e., perceived teacher misbehaviors) sometimes encountered when implementing such strategies in the classroom.

The results of this preliminary study merit further investigation. Some avenues for further research include the following: Are there particular courses where the sharing of such family experience examples or the incorporation of such activities might be more detrimental than beneficial? Is there a gender variable on the part of teacher or students which might limit the effectiveness of parental examples in the classroom? Is age a variable for teacher or for students? Are there certain aspects of family life which, when shared in the classroom, may actually hinder teacher effectiveness or student learning? These and other questions need to be studied if we are to broaden our knowledge about the potential benefits to be gained by bringing family life experiences into the communication classroom.

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